

Naval War College Review

Volume 38

Number 2 *March-April*

Article 16

1985

Command of the Sea: The History and Strategy of Maritime Empires

James L. Stokesbury

Clark G. Reynolds

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Stokesbury, James L. and Reynolds, Clark G. (1985) "Command of the Sea: The History and Strategy of Maritime Empires," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 38 : No. 2 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol38/iss2/16>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

but vanished past, a confusing present, and a future which looked even more ominous as the Victorian and Bismarckian Empires drifted into a future war which Mahan's contemporary, the Polish, Jewish banker and economist Ivan S. Bloch saw as one of technical, economic, and political disaster." Ropp suggests that the situation is similar to our own. With that in mind, the early efforts which Schurman describes can make profitable reading for those who ponder the best method for educating naval policymakers in a period of rapid change.

JOHN B. HATTENDORF
 Naval War College

Reynolds, Clark G. *Command of the Sea: The History and Strategy of Maritime Empires*. Malabar, Fla.: Robert E. Krieger, 1983. 2 volumes, 646pp. \$19.50 each

There may well be those who will argue with some of the theses and points of view expressed in Clark Reynolds' *Command of the Sea*, but few of them will be professional naval officers. This wide-ranging and encyclopedic study was first published, as a single volume, by William Morrow of New York in 1974, when one reviewer called it "one of the most scholarly and important volumes on Sea Power since E. B. Potter and C. W. Nimitz" It now reappears in a two-volume format, revised and updated, with the very useful maps of the original offered in a small separate booklet.

Clark Reynolds is one of the best-known of serious American naval

historians. He studied under Theodore Ropp at Duke University—to whom his book is dedicated—and he has taught at the US Naval Academy and the University of Maine, as well as lecturing at the Canadian Forces Staff College in Toronto and elsewhere. He is now at the naval museum at Patriot's Point in North Carolina.

Command of the Sea is an ambitious project. Reynolds says, "all maritime states and non-maritime-centered peoples who have plied the sea must be analyzed historically and strategically if seapower is to be appreciated, understood, and applied in the future," and this analysis is what he then embarks upon. There is a good bit of modernized Admiral Mahan lurking in these pages, and one is reminded of Secretary Stimson's remark that whenever he entered the Navy Department he felt as if he were in a realm where "Neptune was God, Admiral Mahan his prophet, and the U. S. Navy the one true church." Thus Reynolds maintains that seapower, true thalassocracy, is a mix of national homogeneity, geographic and strategic situation, political liberalism, capitalistic economics, dominance of a middle class, religious toleration, intellectual freedom, and a disposition toward a navy rather than an army. He claims there have really only been four of these—classical Athens, Venice during the Renaissance, the seventeenth-century Netherlands, and more recently Great Britain. He would like to add the contemporary United States, but regretfully decides that it does not

entirely fit the rather exclusive parameters he has set up. Some will undoubtedly argue with his limitations and his choices; it might well be that religious toleration is a fortunate accident rather than an essential precondition, and a case might be made that sixteenth-century Portugal came as close to filling these criteria as did the seventeenth-century Netherlands.

The stage set, Reynolds begins with primitive man and works his way through to 1815 in the first volume, then goes on to present times in the second. In this new edition, after the lapse of ten years, he has expanded the final section on the Russian-American naval rivalry, and retained an epilogue on "World War III," which ends, as good history in the classical tradition, back where it all started, with primitive, post-nuclear man venturing forth once more upon the waters, trying to put his world together again. He does not see the Russians as a truly maritime power, but rather as a continental land empire playing with seapower and not entirely understanding its possibilities, or its limitations, much in the fashion of the Germans at the turn of this century casually taking on the British. Unfortunately, Reynolds does not see the United States as quite like the British Empire of 1900, who had some conception, no matter how dimly enunciated, of the role of seapower and its primacy in their scheme of things. Vietnam, Reynolds says, "exposed American ignorance of maritime strategy." In this he echoes Professor Ropp, who

used to walk into his military history classes, rub his hand over the map, and say lovingly, "Everything blue belongs to us." What Americans learned in Vietnam was that everything that was not blue did not belong to us.

In spite of that, a navy remains the most visible, and quite possibly the most potent means of projecting *usable* power, as the earlier maritime states all recognized. Anything that reminds Americans of that fundamental point is welcome; this new issue of a work whose original went out of print all too quickly is highly recommended.

JAMES L. STOKESBURY
Acadia University

Luttwak, Edward N. *The Grand Strategy of the Soviet Union*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983. 242pp. \$14.95

The premise that the Soviet Union is a classic continental empire—one which has been shaped by a succession of ideological, political and economic failures is fundamental to Edward Luttwak's thoughtful analysis of the grand strategy of the Soviet Union. Failure in peaceful competition with the United States has compelled the Soviet Union to channel its energies into developing military forces to support further expansion. But how does the Kremlin plan to employ these forces? The reality of Soviet strategic intent lies between two extremes, that of a rational nation with essentially defensive aims and that of a contemporary Nazi Germany bent on war awaiting only adequate military preparations.